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ON PAGE A-1

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Leaks Halting Covert CIA Work; Lighter Curbs Urged

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WASHINGTON—In late 1977 the Central Intelligence Agency planned to undertake three secret intelligence operations and, as required by law, duly described them to eight congressional committees. No objections were voiced, and the projects began.

One was a propaganda campaign against Cuban troops fighting in Ethiopia. The second involved supplying radio and associated equipment to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat so he could communicate with aides without being overheard by his own military officers—and so he could eavesdrop on his own military. The third called for supplying the same equipment to Sudan President Jaafar Numeiri.

But all three operations were "blown" several months later, according to Administration sources, when they were mentioned in the New York Times.

The projects were cited in the newspaper as examples of a new permissiveness by congressional oversight committees toward covert CIA actions only a few years after the exposure of CIA abuses.

Administration officials cite the projects as examples of something else, however. They see them as part of a pattern that has brought U.S. covert actions to a virtual halt through leaks. And they blame the leaks primarily on congressmen who have been briefed under the disclosure requirements of the Hughes-Ryan Amendment of 1974.

Under that provision, sponsored by then-Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-Iowa) and the late Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.) as an amendment to an appropriations measure, six committees—Armed Services, Appropriations, and Foreign Affairs of both the House and the Senate—must be notified of planned covert activities.

Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) said this means that "nearly 50 senators, over 120 congressmen and numerous staff members receive this highly sensitive information." The implication was that this is no way to keep a secret on Capitol Hill.

The Senate and House Intelligence committees, created after passage of the Hughes-Ryan Amendment, also must be briefed on such projects.

Efforts are under way, as part of the writing of a new intelligence charter, to repeal the Hughes-Ryan requirement. In large part it is spurred by a desire to curb leaks such as the one that "blew" the 1977 operations.

However, Administration officials and congressmen prefer to take the position in public that the House and Senate Intelligence committees have brought the CIA under control and that the Hughes-Ryan measure is thus no longer needed.

Additional support for the reform comes from the belief of some in Congress that the public is tired of seeing the CIA picked on and that it now views the agency as unable to protect U.S. interests—from Afghanistan to the Caribbean.

"There is recognition," one official said, "that the United States should have options for protecting itself in the world, options that lie between a mere diplomatic protest note and sending in the Marines."

But the reform effort does face some trouble. A majority in Congress probably favors repeal of the Hughes-Ryan measure, but most members of the six committees object to losing their briefing rights—just as they object to any other loss of power.

Hughes-Ryan also is tied into broader intelligence charter issues. Many moderate and conservative representatives reportedly see little mileage in voting for a charter that legally restricts CIA actions.

At the same time, many liberals who want a tight rein on the intel-

attempt by... intelligence community, makes covert activities nearly impossible to keep secret—thus making them nearly impossible to carry out.

It was passed in the wake of disclosures about CIA operations in Laos and Cambodia, when there was some public sentiment for forbidding all covert actions.

One effect of Hughes-Ryan apparently has been to jeopardize not only covert projects but the lives of CIA and other agents as well.

"We have lost one or two agents under strange circumstances, that might have emanated from leaks," Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence subcommittee on the charter, said in an interview.

"But whether the leaks came from Congress, the White House, the State Department, or elsewhere, who knows? President Carter has said there were more leaks from the White House than from either of the two Intelligence committees of Congress."

"A lot more than two agents were lost," said an Administration source, who tended to blame the six congressional committees for most leaks.

"Many of the congressmen who must be briefed under Hughes-Ryan are deeply and irretrievably opposed to covert action as inherently, morally wrong," he said. "They veto operations by leaking."

One example of congressional leaks was the action of opponents of the Panama Canal treaties. They contended publicly that the U.S. government had evidence that Panama leader Omar Torrijos was involved in drug trafficking. To refute the charge, the Senate went into closed session during which the chairman and vice chairman of the Intelligence

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